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ABSTRACT

The supportive role of the Church in school integration and bilingual bicultural education is linked to the religious goal of creating an "inclusive society." Legal requirements behind equal education programs and a number of reasons for the acceptance of multicultural education and integration are outlined. Ways that Presbyterians may facilitate the desegregation process through community action are described. These include working with other community groups to develop an awareness of and positive feelings about integration, bilingual education and an integrated society. (GC)

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EDUCATION AND INCLUSION:*

A Report on: The Church's Ministry in School Desegregation and Bilingual/Bicultural Education

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When Christ prepared his Church to grow beyond the circle of the Galilean disciples, the time was marked by the miracle of Pentecost, and persons of every nation and language heard the mighty acts of God proclaimed in their own speech.

To hear and understand for oneself, to speak and think in familiar words and phrases, is universally the mark of inclusion and the key to participation, now no less than in the First Century. For Christians, the Pentecost event is a symbol not only of the universal mission of the Church, but of God's abiding purpose to create an inclusive human family. When Christians turn their attention to the barriers and exclusions that divide persons in our society, they do so in the name of the Lord whose gift is to enable us to hear one another with understanding.

Therefore, as Christians, we welcome the work of educators and concerned parents who are seeking to provide public education that affirms the variety of students' backgrounds, prepares them for effective participation in society, and speaks to them in a language they can understand. As United Presbyterians, we offer our support to the movement for bilingual/bicultural education as a continuation of our historic concern for education that helps to create an inclusive society by breaking down barriers based on economic status, race, language and culture. The Council on Church and Race offers this study in the hope that it will assist United Presbyterians who

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are building this inclusive society in their own communities.

I. Education and the Inclusive Society: The Church's Historic Concern.

The Constitution and the Bill of Rights present the design for a pluralistic society. The premise of this design is that persons of various religions and cultures can live in one society, with each group protected in its distinctive identity and all groups sharing the same opportunities to participate in the wider community. Christians recognize in this constitutional order a reflection of their concern for human inclusiveness. As Christians, we prize the pluralism of our society, but we recognize an imperative to push this pluralism deeper, to expand the reach and the reality of pluralism until it matches our vision of a genuinely inclusive society.

An inclusive community cares for all its people. An inclusive community creates no barriers based on economic status, race, language or culture. Where those barriers have existed in the past, the inclusive community is committed to removing them and to eliminating their effects from its institutions. The inclusive community seeks participation by all its people, and it provides opportunities for each person to make a satisfying and personally rewarding contribution to the life of the whole.

It has been a special ministry of Presbyterians to stress the role of education in an inclusive society. "Education is the formation of the public," a special committee of the Presbyterian Churches reminded us in 1969. It is "the sum of all those ways in which men (and women) recognize and accept their solidarity with one another."[1] Because all human solidarity is a gift of God's

[1]From "An Open Letter: The Public and Its Education," prepared by the Special Joint Committee on the Church and Public Education, UPCUSA and PCUS, p. 7.

creation and a sign of his covenant with us, the education that enables persons to affirm their solidarity with one another must always have a high priority for Christian people.

Full realization of our human solidarity requires general participation in society's deliberations and decisions, a participation based on public skills that only education can provide. Education for an inclusive society must achieve at least the purposes of elementary and secondary education set forth by the 184th General Assembly (1972):

1. To give everyone an opportunity to learn to use society's basic systems of communication: reading, writing, computing, responding, and relating.

2. To foster creativity, imagination, and curiosity in individuals and learning groups.

3. To develop each child's sensitivity to the variety of cultural, ethnic, and religious heritages in our world.

4. To help students understand how their economic order functions and to develop occupational abilities with which to live creatively.

5. To help students to discover and adopt values which will be the basis for creative and healthful living.

6. To enable students to understand and to take part in reforming their world.

7. To help students understand the use of power, the processes for decision-making, the ways of influencing leadership, and the skills for anticipating and handling the consequences of both public and private actions.

8. To challenge students to undertake the tough process of thinking, identifying problems, exploring and evaluating potential solutions, choosing the best solutions, and implementing them.[2]

[2]"The Church and Public Elementary and Secondary Education," A Statement of the 184th General Assembly (1972) of the United Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.

The first concern of the Church in education must be to preserve the system, public and private, that offer these opportunities for personal development and full participation in the life of society. What has not been stressed enough, however, is that the achievement of these goals must begin with an affirmation of the language, culture and personal identity that the student brings to the school. An education which destroys self-respect and reduces the students' sense of personal potential provides the skills for public participation only at the price of greatly reduced human possibilities. Such education may equip a student to work and to vote, but it falls far short of erecting the inclusiveness that is the goal of our Christian concern for public education.

II. The Barriers to Inclusiveness: Racial, Linguistic and Financial.

For Black children in the United States, the chief barrier to inclusion in society has been racial discrimination and segregation in education. Since 1954, when the Supreme Court ruled that school segregation violates the constitutional guarantee of equal protection of the law, the Church has supported the full and meaningful integration of the public schools, and many United Presbyterian congregations and individuals have given their time and energy to make desegregation work in their own communities. The General Assembly has repeatedly affirmed the goal of desegregated education,[3] and the Task Force on Racism in Public Education of COCAR has identified and shared resources to help our churches meet the challenge of desegregation

[3]See, for example, the statement of the 184th General Assembly (1972), "Struggle for Educational Justice," which was reaffirmed by the 188th General Assembly (1976).

on a local level. These efforts proceed from our belief that where racial discrimination has been found, eliminating the patterns that artificially concentrate Black students in certain public schools is the most immediate, effective way to move toward an inclusive educational system.

For millions of other children, however, the chief barrier to inclusion is linguistic. These are the children whose primary language is other than English. No one knows exactly how many they are. Many of them are not in school at all; others are misclassified as "slow learners" or "behavior problems" because they do not fully understand the language of instruction in their schools. These children cannot be helped simply by breaking down the artificial barriers that separate them from youngsters of the English-speaking majority. They are victims of prejudice, to be sure, but they also have real educational needs which must be met.

Congress has provided for these youngsters through the Bilingual Education Act of 1974, which provides for the training of bilingual teachers and assists state and local education officials to design and coordinate programs for children who need them. Moreover, the Supreme Court has ruled in Lau v. Nichols (1974) that all children, regardless of the language they speak, are entitled to meaningful participation in their community's public schools. Local school systems now have clear obligations under the law to identify students whose primary language is other than English and to provide them with educational services that will enable them to keep pace with their English-speaking peers in learning the skills that are essential to participation in the wider society.

Unfortunately, some have interpreted this ruling to mean only that every student must become proficient in English. That limited goal fails to provide the affirmation of the student's own background that is the essential foundation for effective education. A program that makes the learning of English its most important educational goal is inefficient and unrealistic. It makes no use of the child's primary learning in his or her own culture; and it ignores the reality of these non-English-speaking cultures as elements of our pluralistic society and of the world.

An effective, realistic education for the non-English-speaking child must be bilingual/bicultural education.[4] These educational programs develop cultural and ethnic pride as well as understanding between people. They use the student's primary language and culture to teach, maintain, and develop necessary academic and social skills, not only in the student's primary language and culture, but also in the language and culture of the dominant society. The students are thus provided with opportunity to expand their conceptual and linguistic abilities in a successful and positive manner. The end result is a wholeness which permits the student to function in both languages and cultures.

The barriers based on race, wealth, culture and language that thwart the goals of inclusive public education are reinforced today by the financial crisis in the schools. The soaring costs of local government and the declining number of white, middle-class children combine to threaten the priority that was given to education during

[4] Bilingual/bicultural education is the technical term for a program which not only develops fluency in two languages, but also meaningfully relates the student to the cultural heritage a linguistic group represents. Because many areas offer exposure to a wide variety of cultures, some educators now prefer to describe these programs as bilingual/multicultural education.

the prosperous years of the 1960's. Nor is it surprising that this financial burden falls most heavily on relatively poor school districts in large cities and rural areas, districts which enroll the largest number of Black, Hispanic, Asian and Native American students.

The programs that provide quality integrated education and bilingual/bicultural education are expensive, especially in their initial phases. Although the costs of "forced busing" are too often made to bear the blame for other problems of management or finance, we must recognize that the barriers to inclusive education will be insurmountable for many local systems if they must continue to rely on traditional property tax revenues. The task of providing fuller, fairer funding for public education falls principally on state legislatures, and over half of our fifty states are currently reviewing their procedures of school finance. Because these decisions are made at the state level, every citizen, regardless of place of residence, has an opportunity to work for the needed changes.

III. The Task of the Church: Basic Principles

The problems of effective desegregation, bilingual/bicultural education, and fuller, fairer funding by no means exhaust the challenges to public education today: but these three are critical to the achievement of the inclusiveness that effective public education should provide. It would be tragic if the advocates of these programs forgot their fundamental unity of purpose and fell into rivalry, with desegregationist calling for rigid formulas to disperse minority pupils among the schools, linguistic and cultural minorities demanding the concentration of their children in special centers, and both competing for the increasingly scarce dollars for public education.

To help prevent this fragmentation, the United Presbyterian Church must at all times be mindful of its fundamental principle that the education of the public is a means toward an inclusive community. The goals of quality integrated education and bilingual/bicultural education can be maintained within this common framework. Both desegregation and bilingual/bicultural education seek to provide a student with those basic skills of the wider society where all cultures meet to work, to vote, to build, and to plan. Both seek to provide these basic participation skills in the context of personal wholeness that comes when the school affirms the student as a person and values what the student brings to the classroom as well as what is learned in it.

It is crucial to this wholeness that education for an inclusive society not become a "remedial" program in cultural assimilation, designed exclusively for racial and linguistic minorities. Public schools --- the "mainstream" of American education --- must be open to the widest possible range of students. School districts with a homogeneous student population should make special efforts to provide a variety of cultural experiences and options in the curriculum. Voluntary efforts to link city and suburban school systems, which carry the mixing of races and cultures beyond the strict requirements of desegregation law, should be encouraged. Bilingual/bicultural education must become a valued opportunity for students who do speak English to learn the culture and the language of those who do not.

Education for inclusiveness cannot mean the reduction of all students to one favored set of cultural competences. It must mean

an increase in the skills of understanding, communication, and acceptance for all persons, including those who happen to have been born in the dominant culture. The schools meet our real needs only when education opens our eyes to the multiplicity of cultures that already exists around us and helps us to build bridges to other ways of being human.

In a world increasingly knit together by networks of communication and economic ties, the cultural diversity of American society is a resource to be valued. Education achieves inclusiveness only when it helps us all to appreciate and preserve that diversity.

IV. The Task for the Church: Practical Suggestions.

The constitutional prescriptions for an inclusive society are framed by the Supreme Court's decisions in Brown vs. Board of Education (1954), which requires one, unitary school system to serve all public school students in an area, and Lau vs. Nichols (1974), which requires consideration of each individual student's langauae needs in the public school program. Local communities, with or without the pressure of court orders, must establish their own systems to meet these requirements of unity and individuality; and no arithmetical formula can determine when or whether the constitutional mandate is satisfied. Indeed, the details of the plan are perhaps less important for the future of a community and its schools than how the plan is formulated and implemented. United Presbyterians, acting through their congregations and community groups can affect this how in some important ways:

UNDERSTANDING THE SITUATION

1. Know where the desegregation process stands in your community, and how it is likely to develop. Is your school district under a court order to desegregate? Is it under an HEW plan, or a plan drawn by the state Board of Education? Are lawsuits pending or are there investigations in process? The Council on Church and Race provides information to help communities understand the desegregation process and identify resources for planning at each stage.

2. Know your needs for bilingual/bicultural education. What are the languages other than English spoken in your community? How do children from these homes function in the school system? How many teachers are trained to provide bilingual/bicultural education? Accurate statistics on linguistic minorities are hard to find, but a working group of people who know their community can often arrive at a preliminary assessment of needs and begin a more thorough investigation through schools and community organizations.

DESIGNING A PLAN

3. Encourage early and extensive community participation in desegregation planning. Too often, desegregation is conceived of as an issue between Blacks and whites which does not immediately concern other linguistic or cultural minorities. Later, when the comprehensive impact of desegregation plans on the entire educational systems becomes apparent, it may be too late to give adequate consideration to the needs and goals of non-Black minority groups.

4. Form coalitions with other community groups. Churches, acting alone, usually have little impact on community policy. Churches in coalition with other groups can help to bridge the gap between those

whose first priority is desegregation and those who are most concern with bilingual/bicultural education. Church participation helps to insure the development oa a broadly based plan that will improve educational opportunities for all groups in the community.

5. Insist on features that increase competences through the whole community, rather than one-sided attempts to correct supposed minority "deficiences." Desegregation plans can provide magnet schools that offer genuinely new educational programs. By law, bilingual/bicultural programs should provide opportunities for English-speaking students to learn another language and cultural heritage.

IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

6. Encourage parental and public involvement in a variety of organizations that affect the implementation of educational policy. Traditional parent-teacher groups often require special efforts to include minority parents and to develop new minority leadership. Court-related citizens' panels, which are sometimes regarded as extensions of unpopular court orders, require public support to insure adequate, representative participation. Finally, new patterns of pupil assignment and new educational programs call for the formation of new voluntary organizations that can see a city's educational resources as a whole and assist parents and pupils to make the best use of the resources of the system.

7. Develop awareness of the values of bilingual/bicultural education for students whose primary language is English. All students can benefit from these educational techniques, and in communities which have significant linguistic minorities, the bilingual/bicultural

program offers definite practical and vocational advantages to the majority-culture student. Majority community interest and participation in bilingual/bicultural programs prevents the isolation of minority pupils solely on the basis of their linguistic needs and helps to insure that these programs will serve their purpose of inclusiveness.

MAINTAINING THE GAINS

8. Train parents for involvement and advocacy in education issues. Churches are natural centers for recruitment, and the ongoing strength of the community coalitions that maintain effective, inclusive education will depend on the development of new leadership and citizen support. Churches can help maintain public support by training their members to understand local organizations and to participate effectively in their programs.

9. Stress the importance of public education to <u>all</u> persons in an inclusive society. Declining enrollments, rising costs, and the pressure of other urban financial problems encourage cities to lower the priority of education. Suburbanites resist the cost of state relief for city school systems. These short-sighted attitudes shift the burdens of urban education increasingly on to individual parents and hard-pressed city taxpayers, while ignoring benefits and responsibilities that all citizens share with respect to the schools.

10. Celebrate positive outcomes. Too often, failures make news and successes go unnoticed. The Church can mark successes in its acts of worship and thanksgiving, and pastors and church members can provide a symbolic, supportive presence at public events in the schools.

The achievement of an inclusive society is a task before us, not a

present reality. The constitutional requirements for inclusiveness are still being formulated and the working models have yet to be created. The Church cannot ignore the details of desegregation plans, bilingual/bicultural education programs, and school finance proposals; but neither can we forget the overarching goal of inclusiveness that has shaped our historic concern for the education of the public. If we remember where we are going in the midst of busing plans, curriculum proposals, funding crises, and special commissions, then the integral relations of these activities to each other and to our mission and proclamation will become clear. Our commitment to a society that accords dignity and participation to all persons begins where our mission and proclamation themselves are rooted: in the experience of the Holy Spirit, who both speaks in the language of each and makes all one.

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